

SOME BEGINNINGS OF THE CHURCH
OF THE
UNITED BRETHREN IN CHRIST

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Some Beginnings of The Church of the
United Brethren In Christ

A Dissertation
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of the
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Kiyoshi Yabe

Chicago

Summer 1914

Sources.

I. Original Sources.

The library of the Historical Society of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, Dayton, Ohio, preserves the ordination license and a number of letters of Otterbein and possesses manuscripts and records pertaining to the early history of the denomination. Otterbein was a preacher, not a writer. He wrote a little and of this, very little has been handed down.

1. The certificate of ordination when Otterbein became a missionary to America. The original copy was handed to Rev. John Hildt by Otterbein, near the close of his life, and by Hildt placed in the library of the Historical Society of the denomination. The original certificate is in Latin. The certificate was given on Feb. 28, 1752, by John Henry Schramm, Superintendent of the Church of Nassau, who esteemed Otterbein very highly.

2. Constitution and ordinances of the German Evangelical Reformed Church at Baltimore. The original writing is in German. An English translation may be found in Drury's "Life of Otterbein."* They are dated Jan. 1, 1785. The constitution and ordinances of the German Evangelical Reformed Church have become the basis of the discipline of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.

3. Life and Journal of Christian Newcomer. Printed by F. W. Kapp, Hagerstown, Md., 1834. Transcribed, corrected, and translated by John Hildt. It contains Bishop Newcomer's travels and labors in the Gospel from 1795 to 1830. The life of Newcomer, prefixed to the Journal, was written by himself in the German language, during the last year of his life. His Journal was also written by himself in the same language, and embraces the period of 35 years. The writer recorded

* pp 174-182.

with some length the latter days of Otterbein. Unfortunately, however, the Journal has so many omissions, even in regard to the matter of highest importance, that little can be inferred from its silence.

4. Boehm's Reminiscence. Published by Carlton and Porter,* New York, 1866. The writer, Henry Boehm, is the son of Martin Boehm, and was the travelling companion of Bishop Asbury. Boehm published the Reminiscence for the purpose of preserving the records and recollection of the early M. E. Church. The author incidentally writes on "The United Brethren in Christ - Sketch of Otterbein, etc." (Ch. XXXII) and the "Death, Funeral and Character of Rev. Martin Boehm." (Ch. XXXI). Boehm's testimony as to the general fact has great value.

5. Minutes of the Conferences of the "United Ministers." The original minutes are written in German. Dr. J. H. Dubbs translated them into English and published them in the "Reformed Quaterly" of 1884.** Following are the dates and places of the conferences: May 29, 1774, - Pipe Creek, Md; Oct. 2, 1774, - Pipe Creek, Md; June 12, 1775, - Fredericktown, Md; Oct. 15, 1775, - Baltimoretown, Md; June 2, 1776, - Hagerstown, Md; Oct. 20, 1776, - Conewago, Pa. ***

6. Minutes of the Annual and General Conferences of the United Brethren in Christ. 1800 - 1813. The denomination should congratulate itself on the preservation of the minutes almost entire of all the early conferences.

7. Otterbein's letters.

a. A letter written in English on the subject of the theater. On December 26, 1811, the theater at Richmond, Va., took fire during an

* 200 Mulberry Street.

** pp. 123-127.

*** Adams County, -not name of town but Creek.

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exhibition, and 72 persons lost their lives. The wife and daughter of the cousin of Otterbein were among the victims. Otterbein wrote to his cousin soon after his bereavement.

b. A letter on the subject of the millenium. It was written in English. The letter gives the generally accepted doctrine on the subject of the millenium. No date.

c. A letter written in German, without date or signature. The subject presented in the letter is sanctification, justification, and church-discipline. Quite a long letter.

d. A letter addressed to a man that in 1804 was a member of Otterbein's Church in Baltimore, but afterward left Baltimore and fell into an intemperate habit. The letter was written in German, and for energy of intense Godly interest in a lost soul, it furnishes a lofty example.

8. Lehre and Zucht-Ordnung der Vereinigten Brüder in Christo. The disciplines of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ in German between 1814-1841. It was published in 1895 at the U. B. Publishing House. Contains the confession of faith, constitution, and the duties of the officers.

II. Secondary Sources.

A. General Sources.

1. D. Berger. In New-Schaff-Herzog Encycl. of Religious Knowledge. vol. XII. Article "United Brethren in Christ," 1908, New York, Funk and Wagnals Co. Concise summary of the origin, organization, and work.

2. W. J. Shuey. In Mc Clintock and Strong's Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, vol. X. article

IV.

"United Brethren in Christ." New York, Harper and Bros. 1869-1887.

The origin of the church is more elaborately developed than Berger's in Schaff-Herzog.

3. D. Dorchester: Christianity in the U. S. New York, 1888.

Scholarly treatment of the condensed summary of the United Brethren in Christ.

4. D. Berger. In the American Church History Series. Vol. XII.

1894. Christian literature Company, New York. The best for orientation.

B. Special Sources.

(A) Secular source. Griffith's Annals of Baltimore. Griffith gives to the separate religious society attached to Otterbein in 1774 the name "German Evangelical Reformed Church."

(B) History recorded by the religious denomination from which the United Brethren in Christ arose.

1. H. Harbaugh. Fathers of the Reformed Church. Vol. II. Published by Spener and Westbaeffer, Lancaster, Pa., 1857. Good account of the life of Otterbein. As to the origin of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, he blames, not Otterbein, but his followers. Criticizing Spayth who traces the origin as early as 1730. Harbaugh affirms that the denomination was not yet organized at Otterbein's death in 1813. In my estimate there must be middle ground between Spayth and Harbaugh; the Church of the United Brethren in Christ has its origin in about 1800.

2. J. H. Dubbs' article on "Otterbein and the Reformed Church" in the Reformed Quaterly Review, Jan., 1884.* The strongest expression of the Reformed point of view.

* Reformed Church Publication Board, Philadelphia.

3. J. Funk. Mennonites Church and Her Accusers. Published in 1878. The author criticizes Boehm and says that the latter "errored in the doctrine of Christ" and "allowed himself to walk in the broad way." His sympathy is entirely for his own denomination.

(C) History recorded by the denominations of neutrality.

1. A. Steven: History of Methodist Episcopal Church. New York, Methodist Book Concern, 1875. Personality of Otterbein is elaborately recorded. The writer evidently got his information from the writings of Bishop Asbury, who was intimately acquainted with Otterbein. This work in its volume I,* informs us also of the harmonious relation existing between the two denominations during the first decade of the 19th century.

2. R. Yeakel: History of Evangelical Association. Cleveland, Ohio. Lauer and Mattil, 1893. In 1813, the Evangelical Association and the United Brethren in Christ met in council. The written communication on the subject of union between the two bodies is quoted in this book.**

(D) History written by the denomination.

1. H. G. Spayth. The History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. Published at the Conference Office of the United Brethren in Christ, Circleville, Ohio, 1851. He traced the history of the denomination with moderate fullness, down to about 1850. Spayth is the first historian of the Church; his work is largely drawn from original sources. There is, however, some room for improvement.

2. John Lawrence: The History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. Published at the United Brethren Printing Establishment, 1868. His treatment is fuller than that of Spayth. It covers the

* pp. 219 ff.

** pp. 84, 85.

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the ground until 1861. The writer tries to trace the antecedents of the United Brethren in Christ. "High Churchman", he says, "have their antecedents and the United Brethren have theirs." His attempt, however, to connect the United Brethren in Christ to the "Unitas Fratrum" is misleading.

3. A. W. Drury: "Life of Otterbein." Published at the United Brethren Publishing House, Dayton, Ohio, 1884. Few works can compare in clearness of conception and conciseness of statement. The sources of his information are accurately indicated in the foot note.

4. D. Berger: "The History of the United Brethren in Christ." The United Brethren Publishing House, 1897. It was written by the official expression in a resolution adopted by the General Council of 1889. It covers the ground as late as the date of publication.

5. G. M. Mathews: "A Century of United Brethren History and Achievement." Collection of the addresses delivered at the Centennial Celebration of the Founding of the denomination. U. B. Publishing House, 1901. It is a scholarly review of the progress of the Church and a good resume of the history of the United Brethren in Christ.

6. H. A. Thompson: "Our Bishops." U.B. Publishing House, 1903. A concise sketch of the rise and growth of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ as shown in the lives of its distinguished leaders.

(E) Miscellaneous.

1. Reformites Wochenblatt. Published at Elberfeld, Germany, 1874.* History of Otterbein family, including a short account of Philip William Otterbein.

2. Dobo This is Japanese United Brethren Monthly. Otterbein was introduced intelligently in Dobo in the years 1911 and 1912.

3. Correspondences with Prof. A. W. Drury, Bonebrake Theological

* June-July.

VII.

Seminary, Dayton, Ohio. The writer expresses his hearty gratitude to Dr. Drury who assisted him much in collecting sources and contributed many valuable suggestions.

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Some Beginnings of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.

Introduction.

A revival of vital spiritual religion among the Germans of America in the latter half of the eighteenth century resulted in a meeting of leaders near Baltimore, Md., and an organization of the religious society called "The United Brethren in Christ." In order to understand the circumstances which led to the organization of the Church, it will be necessary to sketch the history of early German immigration and the religious condition of these people in the eighteenth century.

Large numbers of Protestant Germans, conspicuously those suffering from devastations of the French in the Upper Palatinate, a country lying on both sides of the Rhine, came to the United States in the colonial era. The Mayflower of German immigration was the British ship "Concord", which landed in the harbor of Philadelphia, October 6, 1683, bringing among its passengers the first colony of Germans. The tide of German immigrants soon assumed gigantic proportions, so that more than 30,000 names of Germans, Swedes, and Dutch were numbered among those who settled in America between 1727 and 1776.

The causes of this extensive migratory movement, as with the English settlers, in America, were both political and religious. The cruel and ambitious schemes of the powerful Louis XIV of France, and the calamities of the western provinces of Germany during the reign of that unprincipled monarch, were in many cases the direct cause. "Successive waves of pillage, fire, and blood rolled over that unhappy land caused the long stream of immigration."* Professor

* Dorchester: "Christianity in the U. S." p. 34.

Seidenslicher in his "Geschichtblätter" counts the religious reason to be very strong. Under the terms of the Peace of Westphalia, in 1648, none but Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinistic confessions were recognized by the German Government. Pietists, Mennonites, Schwenkfeldians, in fact all who dared to differ from these confessions, were exposed to various forms of persecution. Mennonites from Germany founded Germantown, Pa., about 1681-1684, and in 1707 a large number settled in Lancaster County, Pa. In 1722 they were supposed to constitute the third part of the population of that region. Among these Germans there were a considerable number of Moravians. The earlier German immigration spread into Maryland, Virginia, Carolinas and Maine.

Previous to the time of the American Revolution the immigration was not only extensive but very pure with a high standard of morality and distinguished for Christian virtues. They were not the rich, the voluptuous and the effeminate, nor were they poor and spiritless, but from the middle class, noted for industry, temperance, and frugality. Taken as a whole, they were not ignorant, but well informed for their times. Many had acquired a good education, almost all could read and were too much developed in thought to be slaves of a despotic power. They were not vicious men of unbridled appetites and lust, but were virtuous.

The first men who immigrated from Germany leaving the Old World for the New had the same conditions that moved the Pilgrim Fathers who came from the British Isles in the "Mayflower". Yet, the spiritual and moral standard of these new settlers, during the eighteenth century had become somewhat low. They had, it is true, freedom to worship God in the New World, but many influences tended to their spiritual deterioration. First, there was lack of competent spiritual leadership. Second, the struggle for subsistence, the

battle for bread, the task of subduing an interminable wilderness, absorbed their time and strength and prevented the cultivation of their spiritual life.

Although the German immigrants of the eighteenth century lacked religious leaders whom they would all follow, there were, indeed, a few good noble men among them. Prof. Henry M. Muhlenburg, from the University of Halle, labored among the scattered members of the Lutheran Communion. Count Zinzendorf, the founder of Moravian Brethren, was already in this country. In addition to these great pioneer missionaries, Rev. Michael Schlatter, a Swiss pastor, performed remarkable work among the Reformed.

Schlatter's work in America has unique significance in the discussion of our theme. In 1746, he came to the U. S. under the auspices of the Synod of North and South Holland as a missionary to the German Reformed immigrants in Pa. Owing to the general poverty and distress in Germany, especially in those districts where the Reformed faith was predominant, Germans were not able to help their brethren in the far off province of the New World. At this time the Hollanders undertook to assist the spiritually destitute and financially helpless Germans in America. After five years of labor in this country, Schlatter went to Europe and presented himself before the classes of Amsterdam, to which had been committed the supervision both of Dutch and German work in America, and asked for further assistance in money and in missionaries. He received a favorable hearing and was sent on to Germany and Switzerland to secure six missionaries, the expense of sending whom was pledged by the General Church of Holland. Schlatter applied at Herborn Academy for these recruits and met with hearty assistance of the faculty of the institution.

Though the young ministers at Herborn were spoken of in a general way as candidates, the perceptor, Philip William Otterbein, the founder of the United Brethren in Christ, volunteered to be the missionary.

I. Preliminary Period. From the birth of Otterbein (1726) until the first meeting of Otterbein and Boehm (1767).

1. Otterbein in Germany.

The early history of any denomination is largely the history of the men under whose influence and labor such denomination took form. In order to study the origin of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, we need to trace far back the early life of the founder.

A. Otterbein family.

William Otterbein was born June 3, 1726, at Dillenburg, in the province of Nassau, Germany. In baptism he was named "Philip William"*, but some way or other, he dropped the first of these names in later life. His father**John Daniel Otterbein is said to have been "the right reverend and very learned man", and his mother is called by the faculty of Herborn School, "the right noble and very virtuous woman."*** In the Otterbein family there was a healthful religious spirit and strong and liberal social sympathies.

William was six years old when his father's ministry, after a term of 14 fruitful years, was abrupt brought to a close by death. The mother for prudential considerations went to Herborn which was

* The Reformed Quaterly Review. Jan, 1884. p. 110.

** See Reformites Wochenblatt. June-July 1874.

*** Thompson: "Our Bishops", p 27.

the seat of a celebrated Reformed School. "What a tribute we have to the mother who was left alone without temporal provision and yet succeeded in educating six sons classically and theologically." * All of them became successful ministers of Christ. We should place the name of Wilhelmina Henriëtte Otterbein along with the mothers of Augustine, Crysostom, and Wesley.

b. Otterbein at Herborn School.

Herborn School, in which the sons of Otterbein family were educated, was founded in the year 1584 while the fires of the Reformation were yet warmly burning. The school consisted of two parts, - the paedagogium, or gymnasium, made up of five classes, and the Academy ** in which the instruction was given by able scholars mostly in the form of lectures. Among the professors in Herborn, special mention must be made of Drs. Schramm and Arnold as having exerted upon Philip William a most salutary influence. Dr. Schramm was an apostle of so-called "Thaetiges Christenthum." As professor in Herborn he lectured on practical divinity. Dr. Arnold was a man of lovely and noble character, was a man of faith and zeal, and felt a special attachment for Otterbein who had enjoyed his instruction in the Latin School at Dillenburg.

A strong influence, at this time, was coming in the form of Pietism, which as to its spirit and method, started with a struggle after purity of heart and emphasized the import of internal elements over the external. The teachers of Herborn School were, more or less, influenced by this new movement. *** "Dr. Schramm was especially inclined to Pietism." It is also said that both Prof. Schramm and

* Drury: "Life of Otterbein". p. 32.

** Instead of "Academy" the term "University" is used in Soehm's German Cyclopaedia.

*** Drury: "Life of Otterbein". p. 41.

Prof. Arnold took great interest in mission work, and in all forms of active Christianity.

It can not be a matter of doubt as to what was the influence of these two superior men upon young Otterbein. Neither can it be doubted what was one of the sources of these rich tides of evangelical life, that after he came to America, filled his heart to overflowing, and furnished a new starting point for spiritual religion among the Germans that had sought homes in the New World.

c. Otterbein's Ministry in Germany.

Having completed his theological course of study in Herborn the young man turned to the Gospel ministry. He, however, according to the rather common custom of Germany at that time, before he entered the ministry spent a short time as a "house-teacher," * in the duchy of Berg, 100 miles northwest of Herborn. Otterbein was appointed by the consistory of Dillenburg to the position of vicar of Ochtersdorf, where he preached once each Sabbath, on the first Wednesday of each month, and on festival days, and held weekly prayer meeting. What may be a surprise to some, a weekly meeting for prayer was an unusual form of service in the churches of Germany then as now. Thus Otterbein was made familiar from the beginning of his ministerial life with this form of service, which has proved so invaluable in encouraging the deeper spiritual life in the church.

Otterbein's ministry at Ochtersdorf was not smooth. It was at this time and in these circumstances that the occurrences given by H. G. Spayth took place: "The zeal, the devotion, and earnestness with which he met his new duties surprised his friends and astonished his hearers. . . . To witness the good impressions made on some was

* Houslehrer.

encouraging. But with this also fiery trials and heavy exercise of mind." When the authorities were privately solicited to arrest his preaching for a season, his mother said to him: "Ah, William, I expected this, and give you joy. This place is too narrow for you, my son." *

Although the opposition was quite strong, it is not likely that his ministrations were even temporarily interrupted. ** It is certain that he continued his vicarate until he met Michael Schlatter and determined to become a missionary to America.

2. Martin Boehm (1725-1811)

Before passing on to Otterbein's further experiences, in this connection, let me introduce to my readers Martin Boehm, "to whom, second to Otterbein, the rise of the United Brethren in Christ is justly due."***

A. Mennonites in Pennsylvania.

I have already stated that among the Protestant Germans, who, toward the close of the seventeenth century, forsook their homes in the old country to escape persecution and enjoy the blessings of religious freedom were some Mennonites. The first Mennonites who came to America arrived in 1683 on an invitation extended to them by *See 2* William Penn to join his colony in America. The first Lancaster County **** Mennonites came in 1709. They were the first settlers the country. In 1735, it is said that there were 500 families of Mennonites in Lancaster County. Martin Boehm belonged to this group.

B. The early life of Boehm.

* Spayth, "History of the United Brethren in Christ", pp 19, 20.

** Drury: "Life of Otterbein" p 48.

*** Spayth! "Hist. of the U.B. in Christ", p 31. Drury considers Boehm as "Co-founder" with Otterbein. (A Century of U. B. History and Achievement, p 12) Berger thinks him as one of the "Associates of Otterbein", (Hist. of U.B. in Christ, p 113.)

**** Pennsylvania.

Little if any of his education, such as it was, was obtained at school. The early Mennonites, though poor, brought with them a few books, and began to multiply the number in this country. Persecution had made them at the same time well acquainted with their principles. Young Martin, being a son of a well-to-do deacon in the society, would be given at home the rudiments of a German education. While a German, and trained to the use of the German language, in later years Boehm learned to read and converse in the English language.

C. Boehm's Conversion.

Although Boehm was nominated to the ministry and chosen by lot, after the Mennonite custom in 1756, he had no message for his people until he experienced vital spiritual conversion as a result of prolonged struggle. * One day, while he was plowing in the field he knelt down at each end of the furrow to pray. The word "verlohren" (lost) went with him every round. Midway in the field he could go no further; he sank behind his plough, crying, "Lord, save, I am lost." In a moment, however, a stream of joy was poured over him; there seemed to have come into his heart the blessing of true peace.

From the time of Boehm's conversion he began to preach the necessity of a thorough regeneration of the heart. His declaration of the doctrine of the new birth found acceptance with some. Others, however, regarded his preaching with doubt and considered him as even fanatic. Nevertheless, in the following year, 1759, Boehm was advanced to the rank of a chief pastor, as the office of a full pastor among the Mennonites was called.

3. Otterbein's early years in America.

A. At Lancaster.

* See: Spayth, "Hist. of the U. B. in Christ", pp 29, ff. Spayth translated Boehm's own statement of conversion. But unfortunately the source is not stated.

On July 28th, 1752, Otterbein with five other missionaries landed in New York and in August he accepted a call from the Reformed Congregation at Lancaster, Pa. Dr. H. Harbaugh, the distinguished historian of the Reformed Church, while never able to free himself of a degree of prejudice toward the United Brethren presents some valuable materials for our discussion. Of Otterbein and his ministry at Lancaster he says that "Otterbein was full of vigor and holy zeal," and that "he labored, during the five years, as appears from the records of that church, amid various discouragement, though with regular success."*

During Otterbein's stay at Lancaster, possibly in the year 1754, he had a unique religious experience which was similar to that of Boehm in 1753. Having preached an earnest sermon on repentance and faith, one of his hearers, awakened to a sense of his condition, came to him for advice. For some unaccountable reason Otterbein knew not what to say to this awakened sinner. His reply was, "My friend, advice is scarce with me to-day." He sought his closet and poured out his spirit to God, and did not leave it until he had that knowledge of spiritual things which in after years made him so competent to give advice to those who were seeking the way of life.

That Otterbein himself regarded this entrance into a deeper religious experience as possessing an important significance in his spiritual life, is indicated in his answer to one of a series of questions propounded to him not long before his death, by Bishop Asbury of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The particular question referred to was, "By what measures were you brought to the Gospel of God and Savior?" Otterbein's answer was, "By degrees was I brought

* "Fathers of the Reformed Church" Vol. II, pp 54 f.

to the knowledge of the truth while I was at Lancaster." But it would be a grave mistake to regard this answer as signifying that Otterbein had not experienced the saving grace of Christ before that time. We are rather to understand that he received more thorough apprehension of the gospel which he had been longing for.

The subsequent pastorates of Otterbein were in Tulpehocken,* an early German settlement embracing portions of Lebanon and Berks counties in Pennsylvania, and Fredericktown, ** Maryland.

B. Otterbein meets Boehm.

In Sept. 1765, Otterbein took charge of the church at York, Pa. *** Imbued by a missionary spirit he traveled and preached elsewhere quite extensively. **** Boehm, like Otterbein, exhibited much activity in this wider preaching of the word, and the meeting at which the two met was held by his appointment. The year can not now be decided. Prof. Drury, in his "Life of Otterbein", after considering the question somewhat exhaustively, places the limit of time as not earlier than 1766, nor later than 1768, with a preference for the later date. The place of meeting was the farm of Isaac Long, in a Mennonite neighborhood in Lancaster County. There were in attendance members of the Lutheran, German Reformed, Mennonites, Dunkers, and other churches, with others who were not church members at all. Otterbein and Boehm had never met before although they lived near each other for a number of years. The great gulf existing between the Reformed and Mennonite Churches likely counted for this. Boehm preached to the people. As the preacher was about to sit down the great heart of Otterbein opened to take in this sweet spiritual man,

* 1758-1760

** 1760 - 1765

*** 1765 - 1774

**** See The Reformed Quaterly Review, Jan. 1884, p. 112.

and clasping him in his arms, he exclaimed, "Wir sind Brüder."* The effect for the moment was startling. Unable to retain their emotions, some of the congregation praised the Lord aloud, but the greater part was bathed in tears. This meeting was the chief starting point of a movement which culminated in a new religious organization, and more than any other one, perhaps, suggested the name "United Brethren."

II. The Cradle Period. From the Meeting of Otterbein and Boehm (1767) until the Conference of 1800.

In 1774 Otterbein left York and went to Baltimore. As this has unique significance in the rise of the denomination which we are studying, it becomes necessary to consider the circumstances which led to this event.

1. The Reformed Church of Baltimore was founded as early as 1750, but a regular pastor was not secured until in 1760. This period of ten years was coincident with that of Otterbein's service in Lancaster and Tulpehocken, and "during this time he made occasional visits to the Church to supply in part its necessities."** His earnest evangelical preaching to its people became the sowing of fruit which was to bear fruit afterward.

At about 1760, Rev. John Faber was elected pastor.*** He was a man of some culture, but his preaching was not acceptable, and it was asserted by his opponents that he lacked an earnest appreciation of the character of his office. Another ground of objection, according to a statement entered by Otterbein on the records of his congregation, was found in the fact that he was not a member of the Coetus.

* "We are Brethren."

** Berger, "History of the U. B. in Christ", p 83.

*** Reformed Quaterly Review. Jan, 1884.-dates "1757" pp 114.

In 1770, Faber's unpopularity became so great that a large portion of the congregation demanded his resignation. * This party was much pleased with the enthusiastic preaching of a man named Schwope, a Reformed minister preaching near Baltimore.

Schwope first appears as an elder in the Reformed Church at Pipe Creek, Maryland, 1763, and as early as 1754, his name is found in the Church book at York, Pa. It appears from his extant manuscript that he was very little educated. Yet, evidently he manifested the oratorical talent which subsequently enabled him to become a popular preacher. In the Baltimore church, many were delighted with his discourses, contrasted with those of Faber, which they declared to be cold and formal.

An effort was accordingly made to displace Faber, but it proved a failure. The dissatisfied party withdrew and built a church of which Schwope became pastor, though as yet he had not received ordination. Neither party regarded the separation permanent and the whole matter was referred to the Coetus for adjudication. Meantime "Schwope was received into membership in the Coetus and regularly ordained."** A committee of investigation was appointed by the Coetus but did not succeed in uniting the congregations.

2. The German Evangelical Reformed Church of Baltimore. The crisis came in the year 1771. The failure to obtain a change in the pastorate led to the withdrawal of the Evangelical party from the Reformed Church. Having settled upon the course they would pursue, they called Schwope to become their pastor and soon afterward purchased several lots for the purpose of building a church.

The ground secured is situated on Conway Street, Howard's Hill,

* Reformed Quaterly Review, Jan. 1884, p 115.

** Harbaugh: "Fathers of the Reformed Church", Vol II, p 390.

and is that upon which the old historic Otterbein Church stands. The title to this ground was not vested in the German Reformed Church, but in chosen members of the congregation, with power of transmission to their successors. The form of this trust was, toward the middle of the nineteenth century, "challenged in a tedious contest in the civil courts, but after a thorough and exhaustive inquiry, was fully and finally confirmed."*

The Coetus of the Reformed Church again made admirable, but unsuccessful efforts to bring about a reconciliation between the now divided sections of the original body. According to the Minutes of the Coetus for 1772 we find that both Faber and Schwope were to resign, but Schwope's people declined to permit him. In 1773, Schwope was very anxious to withdraw, and a call was extended to Otterbein; but he resigned in view of the unsettled condition of the congregation. He, however, expressed a willingness to go if the Coetus should approve. The following year Otterbein was again called and accepted. He was indirectly censured by the Synod. The Church was really an independent organization before Otterbein took charge of it.

The name assumed was "The German Evangelical Reformed Church", or "The Evangelical Reformed Church". The term "evangelical" has not been a part of the title of the German Reformed Church, and its selection in this case under trying circumstances indicated a purpose and intention which nothing else could have so well expressed.

John Hildt, a member of Otterbein's vestry as early as 1809, says of the matter, in a letter published in the "Telescope", July 28, 1858:** "Otterbein called provided he would consent to be, or become independent of the Synod of the German Reformed Church and when he

* Berger, "History of the United Brethren in Christ", p 85.
 ** The "Telescope" was one of the United Brethren weekly papers.

learned this he demanded of them three days' time for consideration, at the expiration of which time he accepted. Being no longer trammelled with the rules and discipline of the German Reformed Church, he formed with the consent of his brethren a new set of rules for the membership of his new and independent church.

3. Rules for Otterbein's Church in Baltimore. *

In the year 1785, a body of rules for the Baltimore Church, written by Otterbein, was adopted. The rules are twenty-eight in number, and constituted a simple yet complete plan of organization and code of discipline. "They became in fact the basis of the United Brethren book of discipline which followed in subsequent years."** It is worthy of note that they made distinct provision for the prayer and social meetings, insisted upon diligence in the performance of various religious duties, and required a pure and exemplary life among ministers and people. On the whole, the emphasis of the rules was on the life instead of the doctrine, although the rule 13 prohibits strictly the doctrine of predestination (Gnadenwahl). Rule 14 is significant as indicating how far-reaching the influence and work of Otterbein had at this time become. The rule lays down as a definite duty incumbent upon every minister who holds membership in the congregation to "care, to the best of his ability, for the various churches in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, which churches, under the superintendence of William Otterbein, stand in fraternal unity with us."

4. The relation with the early Methodist Episcopal missionaries.

Otterbein had a pleasant association with the Methodists in his work. When he began to hold his prayer meetings and to preach

* See Drury: "Life of Otterbein", pp 173-182.

** American Church History Series, Vol. XII. pp 333.

experimental religion there was no Methodist preacher in America. Wesley and Whitefield had both been here but they had organized no church and ordained no preacher. In 1771, Francis Asbury, who later became the first Methodist bishop in America, arrived. May 4, 1774, Otterbein and Asbury met, and a warm personal friendship sprang up between these kindred spirits. These relations so pleasantly begun were continued between these two men and the bodies which they represented until Otterbein's death. When Asbury came to be ordained he requested that Otterbein be associated with the others in the solemn occasions. Asbury often preached at Otterbein's church.

5. "United Ministers."

Before passing on to speak of the first formal conference of 1789, it will be proper here to say something further of some of the associates of Otterbein in the revival work.

a. Martin Boehm - continued to preach the Gospel of a vital spiritual life among his own people, not only to those of his own neighborhood, but to others in various places. His zeal awakened in time serious opposition. Although he was a man of manifest sincerity and sweet disposition, he was disfellowshipped by his Mennonite Brethren. "A formal indictment was at last made against him, and he was cited to answer."*

Boehm, like Otterbein, did not desire to separate from the church in which he was brought up; neither was he moved by any unholy ambition to lead in a schismatic movement. A communication sent out by the Mennonite bishops, ministers, and deacons of the Lancaster County has been preserved. The real cause of Boehm's expulsion, according to this document, were the part that Boehm had in promoting

* Berger: "History of the U. B. in Christ", pp 113.

revivals, and his association with those who belonged to other churches. It is also complained that "Boehm maintained that Satan was a benefit to man" and declared that "faith cometh from unbelief, life from death, and light out of darkness."*

Although Boehm was excommunicated, there was no complete separation at the time. Shortly after his excommunication, and before 1780, we find him preaching regularly by his own appointing at Rohrs on Mill Creek, at Storeys, and at his own place.

B. George Guething.

We find that Guething is given a place in Harbaugh's "Fathers of the Reformed Church." Dr. Harbaugh says that "he was prominently identified with the religious movement which resulted in the sect** of the United Brethren in Christ, with which he fell in as early as 1772. . . . His name appears in the minutes of the synod up to the year 1804, though generally among the absent and excused. At the meeting of the synod in Reading, April 29, 1804, complaints were preferred against Guething on account of disorderly conduct. . . . After a lengthy discussion the resolution for his expulsion was carried by a vote of twenty against seventeen."*** Remarking further, Harbaugh says: "He spent forty years in the ministry. Though wildly fanatical he seemed to have been a good man."

This account of Guething's fanaticism does not damage his character. He was in the strict sense, a product of the revival meeting. "There were combined in him its strictest moral and local characteristics."****

C. Special meetings - began in May, 1774, the year and month of

*Drury: "Life of Otterbein", pp 145 ff.

** Vol. II, p 398.

*** Harbaugh always uses the word "sect" instead of "church".

**** Berger: "History of the U. B. in Christ" p. 118 ff.

Otterbein's coming to Baltimore. Among the ministers themselves some form of bond was adopted, under the name of "the United Ministers." In this they adopted the precise method of Spener in Germany. The United Ministers for two years held regularly semi-annual meetings for the purpose of hearing reports of the work, and planning for its successful prosecution.* The minutes of these meetings were recently discovered at Pike Creek, near Baltimore, where Rev. B. Schwope, the secretary of the "United Ministers" was the pastor.

D. The first formal conference (1789).

This conference has a special historical significance as being the first formal conference held, and as really effecting the organization of the church by forming and adopting a confession of faith and a body of rules of discipline. **

The confession of faith is comprehended in five articles:***

(1) That true God, son, and Holy Ghost are one; the Father in the Son, the Son in the Father, and the Holy Ghost equal in essence with both.

(2) That Jesus Christ is very God and man, Savior and Redeemer of whole mankind.

(3) That we through the Holy Ghost must be sanctified and receive faith, thereby being cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.

(4) That the Bible is the word of God.

(5) That the doctrine which the Holy Scriptures contain shall be preached and proclaimed throughout the whole world.

The first confession of faith recommends the baptism and Lord's supper; and also the washing of the feet, if the same is desired.

* See p II.

** See p III.

*** Condensed by the writer. See the full original form in "Lehre and Zucht-Ordnung der Vereinigten Brüder in Christo", p 3.

"The confession", as Dr. Drury says, "may be taken as a reflection of Otterbein's mind, and when it is regarded as a whole, it is simple and majestic. . . .The creed may be called a working creed - a fit creed for a revival people, whose defense is rather in the heart than in the armor."*

The disciplinary rules which were adopted at the same meeting were based upon the rules adopted four years previously for the Otterbein Church in Baltimore. The reader will observe that the word "church" was used four times in the rules of the English translation.** But the word "Gemeinschaft" was the term in the common use, a word signifying an association, but not necessarily a church.

The meeting was held at Otterbein's parsonage in Baltimore. The members present were William Otterbein, Martin Boehm, George Guething, Christian Newcomer, Henry Weidner, Adam Lehman, and John Eamst. There were seven members present and at least seven absent. Of those present five came from the Reformed faith and two from the Mennonites. Of those absent there were four from the Reformed side, three from the Mennonites, and one from the Moravians.

6. Otterbein's relation to the Reformed Church.

Otterbein came to this country as the minister of the German Reformed Church. After his varied experience at Lancaster, he met with indifference, not to say opposition on the part of the Mother Church. This was more or less at all points until he moved to Baltimore. Here he had charge of an independent Church whose work and methods were not in keeping with those of the Reformed organization. He sought to bring into the church only those who had experienced the pardon of their sins, and to lead those already members into a richer spiritual life. The

* American Church History Series. Vol XII, p 349.

** Disciplines of the United Brethren in Christ. 1814a1841 p. 3.

establishment of class meetings, prayer meetings, and the introduction of lay preaching were among the things which awakened opposition on the part of his Reformed brethren.

Otterbein, it seems, did sustain a two-fold relation in his later life. It was evidently his desire to work within his mother church. Although William Hanby in his "History of the United Brethren in Christ" * says that "this Church took its rise in the United States about the year 1755", we are not ready to accept it. According to the minutes of the Synod, Otterbein was quite regular in his attendance after he took charge of the Church at Baltimore. He was present in 1775, 1776, absent in 1777. From this time on the minutes are lost for several years. For 1783, 1784, and 1785, the minutes are extant; in the first two years he was present, and in the last he was absent, "on account of a journey to Virginia." In 1790 he was absent. From 1790 to 1800 Otterbein was present at the Synod three times. He was present in 1806. His name appears on the minutes up to the time of his death in 1813, and the next year it was dropped.

It is not only Hanby but Spayth also seems to have made a mistake when he says that "Otterbein organized a separate and independent denomination, in Baltimore in 1774."** There is little room for doubting as to Otterbein's relation in the German Reformed Church even after the Conference of 1800.

Although I fail to agree with Spayth and Hanby as to the date of the complete separation of Otterbein from the Reformed Church, I disagree with Harbaugh, who considers Otterbein to have been a loyal son of the mother church till his death. Otterbein, it is true, held a double relation - to "the United Ministers" and the Reformed Church. Yet, there are sufficient reasons to believe that after he became the

* Vol II. p 6. Spayth also dates early.

** "History of the Church of the U. B. in Christ", pp 21, 43.

pastor of the independent Baltimore Congregation he could at no time, in a practical sense, be considered in full membership of the Synod; the extent to which he continued his connection was a matter of offense to his opponents in the Synod.*

III. Formation Period. From the Conference of 1800 until the first General Conference (1815).

1. The Conference of 1800. Considered in relation to the progressive development of the Church, this conference is to be regarded as one of the most important in its history. The conference was held on Sept. 25th and 26th, at the house of Peter Kemp, a little more than two miles west of Frederick City, Md. Newcomer's Journal makes the following brief note: "25th - This morning we set out early; came to Bro. Peter Kemp's, where the conference is to be held; found father Otterbein, Boehm, and twelve other preachers there. The conference was opened with singing and prayer by Otterbein and Boehm. The former gave a powerful exhortation. Then were all the brethren present separately examined respecting their progress in the divine life, their success and industry in the ministry. 26th - This forenoon Father Otterbein preached from Amos 4¹². Boehm spoke after him. After transacting some other business the conference closed with prayer." ** Such is the very brief and incomplete form in which some important items are omitted. It is a rather singular circumstance that in these official minutes of the Conference of 1800 no reference is made to either of the two transactions which gave to the conference its distinguished place in historic importance.

A. The first omission relates to the official adoption of a name for the Church. There are some now living who in their early

* See Drury: "Life of Otterbein", pp 262 f.

** See p 74.

life had acquaintance with those who saw Otterbein and testify in regard to this matter. There is also the written document of Spayth who was the member of the first General Conference. He was personally acquainted with nearly all, if not all, of the men who sat in the conference of 1800. Again, the Discipline of 1815 adds the weight of our statement: "In order now to labor in a truly useful and churchlikeway, the preachers saw themselves obliged to appoint a conference where they might come to unite themselves properly, because some were Reformed, others Lutheran, others Mennonites, etc. They therefore appointed the 25th of Sept., 1800 . . . for the Conference. There came together thirteen preachers, who united themselves into a society which bears the name 'The United Brethren in Christ'".* The dates of this Discipline is so near to that of the Conference which adopted the name and it leaves little room for doubting. A copy of this very Discipline is preserved in the fire-proof vaults of the Church Publishing House, Dayton, Ohio; it is printed in the German language.

B. Election of "Aeltesten".**

Another important step taken by this conference was the election of "Aeltesten". In addition to the evidence coming from Spayth, we find valuable material in the writing of Henry Boehm, who was the member of the Conference: "they (U.B.) elected 'Aeltesten' for the first time. William Otterbein and Martin Boehm, my father, were unanimously chosen." ***

Dr. Harbaugh, on the ground that Otterbein was a "man of great modesty", denies strongly Spayth's statement that Otterbein and Boehm were elected as "bishops". In my estimate, however, "Aeltesten" was not "bishops" but the "elders". **** According to Prof. Drury,

* Discipline 1814-1841. pp 10.

** Or "Eltesten".

*** "Boehm's Reminiscence", pp 55, 56.

**** Heath's German Dictionary gives "Bischof" for bishop. It translates "die Aeltesten" as "the elders".

"in 1813 the term bishop first appears in contemporaneous records."*

2. Relation with the Evangelical Association.

With the opening years of the 19th century the Church known as the Evangelical Association came into being. The type of this new body of Christians, their doctrinal teaching and polity, their insistence upon conversion and Godly life, the spiritual fervor which characterized their preaching, their prayer and class meetings, and their itinerant method of bringing the Gospel, naturally attracted the favorable attention of the United Brethren. The further fact of coincidence in language, their preaching being then wholly in German, seemed to make not only fraternal co-operation, but actual organic union with them desirable. ** In the Conference of Evangelical Association in 1813, the subject of union was discussed. Both the United Brethren and the Evangelical Association appointed a committee of four. They met in council on Nov. 11, 1813, and remained together for several days, but the object of the meeting failed.

3. The First General Conference. 1815.

The two annual conferences, the old conference of the East and the Miami of the West, were separated geographically, and there could be but little interchange of attendance of the members of either at the annual sessions of the other beyond that of an occasional visit. No authorized bishop was present at the session of Miami Conference until after the election of Bishop Newcomer in 1813.

Dr. Drury, who has made a most careful study of the early records, in an article in the United Brethren Quaterly Review, says: "It may be observed that the Eastern Conference, the only conference up to 1810, when the Miami Conference was formed, transacted all of the business for the Church; its records, however, are very meagre

*Extract from his letter to the writer.

** See Also the Minutes of the U.B. Conferences, 1814, 1841. p 31.

and defective. In 1814, the Miami Conference, which in the four years of existence had a rapid growth, felt itself entitled to share in the government of the church, and therefore proposed the formation of the General Conference." *

The Book of Discipline, as agreed upon and set forth by this First General Conference, comprises two parts, namely, first, a Confession of Faith, and, second, a body of rules for the government of the church. The confession was substantially that adopted by the Conference of 1789. The rules also were distinctly traced back through the earlier Disciplines to the rules adopted for Otterbein's Baltimore Church in 1785.

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Conclusion.

The Church of the United Brethren in Christ had its beginning in the revival movement which prevailed among the Germans of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia during the latter half of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth century. The historic New England Revival (1703 - 1758), popularly called "The Great Awakening", was followed by a strong reaction. Dead formalism in the church services widely prevailed. The great revival in the British Islands (1708 - 1788) was not yet felt on the western side of the Atlantic Ocean.

At this time, in the opening years of the second half of the eighteenth century, a young German of scholarly accomplishments, and a heart burning with evangelistic zeal, came as a missionary to America. Otterbein already in his native country, had experienced the pietistic spiritual religion. Undoubtedly his pious parents and devoted teachers had helped him in laying the foundation for the

* Vol III. p 3 f.

future leadership. But he likely had not obtained the deep spiritual experience in the Gospel until his unique experience at Lancaster, Pa.

Besides preaching regularly in Lancaster, Otterbein was, in 1755, appointed a member of two committees of supply, which rendered it necessary for him to preach in Reading and Conewago. It was in the performance of these duties that he engaged in the "itinerant labors." This undoubtedly prepared the way towards the organization of the "United Ministers" whose mission was to save the unsaved regardless of locality.

The year 1774 marked an important era in the history of Otterbein's work in America. Assuming charge of the Baltimore Reformed Evangelical Church, an independent organization, Otterbein was led to form a new religious denomination. Step by step, and without any purpose on his part to organize a separate religious body, he was carried into this movement. Like Count Zinzendorf, when Otterbein found the "Congregation of God in the Spirit", he seems to have imagined that Christians of various denominations might participate in a higher unity without renouncing their original ecclesiastical relations. Like John Wesley, he was disposed to cling to his own Mother Church, and, in fact, he never did formally separate himself.

While we do not deny that Otterbein had his formal relation with the Reformed Coetus until his death, we are not ready to accept Dr. Dubbs' statement "that Otterbein was a faithful member of the Reformed Coetus."* The mere appearance of his name on the Minutes of the Reformed Coetus does not necessarily prove his deep interest in that organization. Although we are not convinced by the statement, "that Otterbein was grievously persecuted and driven into schism", we are unable to believe that until Otterbein's last day, "he pos-

* Reformed Quarterly Review. Jan. 1884. p 110.

sessed the confidence of his (Reformed) brethren."* There are sufficient evidences to convince us that there were at least some members of the Coetus who opposed, with great bitterness, Otterbein's "Great meetings".**

In conclusion let me make the following brief statements:

1. Negative.

A. The United Brethren in Christ is not related to "Unitas Fratrum" of Zinzendorf. Although Lawrence in "The History of the United Brethren in Christ" claims that "it was connected with the Ancient and Renewed Brethren of Bohemia and Moravia", the United Brethren in Christ and "Unitas Fratrum" are wholly separate and distinct, and have no actual historical relations.* The Moravian Brethren were represented in America long before the United Brethren in Christ arose.

B. It is not a branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In doctrine, practice, and usage, the United Brethren in Christ resembles the Methodist Episcopal Church, although the former is not a branch of the latter. The writer, however, finds some influences of Methodism upon the United Brethren. Bishop Asbury of the Methodist Episcopal wrote in his Journal in 1774: "Had a friendly intercourse with Otterbein, and Schwoppe, the German ministers, respecting the plan of church discipline on which they intend to proceed. They agreed to imitate our methods as nearly as possible" The agreement to imitate, however, must be understood as of the most general nature only. The Methodists then did not form a church either in Europe or America.

2. Positive.

A. The United Brethren in Christ is the result of the pietistic movement. Both Otterbein and Boehm were strongly influenced by pietism.

* One of the members of the

a. While Otterbein was studying at Herborn, under Drs. Schramm and Arnold, he was influenced tremendously by pietism.

b. The grandfather of Martin Boehm, Jacob Boehm, a Swiss journeyman, was an exceedingly zealous pietist who was convicted of heresy and was imprisoned.

B. The Church of the United Brethren in Christ arose to supply life in the place of orthodoxy. The early church was a sort of "Evangelistic Band" in which Otterbein and Boehm were leaders. It is evident that Otterbein did not attempt to organize a new denomination. Like Luther and Wesley, he did not start with the idea of new organization, although gradually he was led to form a new institution which supplied life in place of orthodoxy. The Church of the United Brethren in Christ was not broken off from any organization as a matter of church doctrine.

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Yabe, Kiyoshi

Some beginnings of
the Church of the United
Brethren in Christ.

DATE	ISSUED TO
NOV 30 1979	Dennis Doyle
DEC 17 1979	Jim Johnson
AUG 28 1981	Mary L. Funk
	does not circulate

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